(b) if so, by when it is likely to start functioning;

(c) what is the total number of Tea Auction Centres in India and how many of those centres have localized E. auction platforms; and

(d) whether it is also a fact that two more such centres are coming up at Dibrugarh and Jorhat; if so, by when they would start functioning?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) and (b) No such proposal is with Government, at present.

(c) There are six main public tea auction centres at Guwahati, Siliguri, Kolkata, Coimbatore, Coonoor & Cochin. E-auctioning is being conducted on a limited basis at all the major auction centres except Kolkata. At present, the tea portal is being used for compilation of tea statistics, information dissemination and also for running the e-auction engine.

(d) No applications for setting up public auction centers at Dibrugarh and Jorhat had been received by the Tea Board.

BIMSTEC pact on FTA

*54. SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that implementation of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) pact on Free Trade Agreement (FTA) hit a roadblock, following disagreements on contentious issues like Rules of Origin (ROO) sensitive list and tariff liberalization schedule; and

(b) if so, in what manner Government propose to resolve the issue?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) The Framework Agreement on the BIMSTEC FTA (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation Free Trade Area) was signed on 8th February, 2004. The Framework Agreement prescribed for a Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) to be constituted to carry out the negotiations.

Thailand is the Chair country to the TNC and 11 meetings of TNC have been held. The 12th BIMSTEC TNC meeting is being held in Colombo from 25-28 July, 2006. In the negotiations, consensus among the seven members has been reached on most of the text of FTA in goods. Consensus has also been reached on the size of the sensitive list and modality for tariff liberalisation.

However, on Rules of Origin, while good progress has been made in the text, no consensus has yet been reached on the general rule and the derogations for product specific rules.

(b) Since the decision on any issue is required to be taken through consensus, the Government is discussing the outstanding issues with an open mind and undertaking due consultations with stakeholders.

Kaman Aman Setu

*55. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Kaman Aman Setu was launched by engineers of Indian Army, in the presence of Pakistan Army, on 11th February, 2006;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the utility of this bridge in improving Indo-Pak relations; and

(d) the number of persons who have made use of this bridge, so far?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (d) The Kaman Aman Setu, a bailey bridge, was constructed by the Indian Army on the Line of Control, in Uri Sector, to facilitate the running of Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus service between India and Pakistan. As a part of a set of proposals for confidence building with Pakistan, the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus service was inaugurated on 7th April, 2005 by the Prime Minister. However, consequent to October, 2005 earthquake, the Kaman Aman Setu suffered extensive damge and the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Bus service was disrupted. The bridge was re-launched on 11th February, 2006 by the Indian Army and re-inaugurated on 20th February, 2006 by the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

The operationalisation of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service is a landmark event. It has been widely welcomed all over, especially in Jammu